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SUBJECT: GOS FLEXES ITS MUSCLE IN DARFUR

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Within the last two weeks, there are indications that the Government of Sudan (GoS) is flexing its muscle in Darfur. Signs of this include: three firefights between Arab militias/janjaweed and SLM-Minnawi members in the center of El-Fasher; several Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) parades through IDP camps; increased janjaweed activity and presence; and apparent indications of impending fighting between the GoS and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). End SUMMARY.

#### SHOOTINGS AND FIREFIGHTS

¶2. (SBU) For three consecutive days starting on March 30, 2008, shooting between Arab militiamen/janjaweed and members of the Sudan Liberation Movement of Minni Minnawi (SLM-Minnawi) occurred in El-Fasher proper. The first incident appears to have been spontaneous violence (resulting in one wounded SLM-Minnawi member still in critical condition), while later incidents appear to have been coordinated between the police and Arab militias.

¶3. (SBU) On March 30, one SLA-Minnawi member exchanged fire with a GoS soldier in El Fasher. As of April 3, the SLA-Minnawi member remains in a critical condition in an El-Fasher hospital. One day later, three vehicles of SLA-Minnawi members came to the central El-Fasher police station and demanded the arrest of the Arab militia members who attacked their colleague on March 30. Five vehicles with a number of Arab militia immediately came to the police station and the two parties exchanged fire. Also, on March 31, a separate firefight between three SLA-Minnawi and two Arab militia men reportedly took place in El-Fasher, resulting in the death of one SLA-Minnawi member. On April 1, UNDSS also reported more gunshots in El-Fasher's market, though the parties involved have not yet been confirmed. (Note: The information in this paragraph is based on UNDSS situation reports. End Note.)

¶4. (SBU) On April 2, two members of SLM-Minnawi told emboffs that the Arab militia/janjaweed violence is part of the GoS's intentional targeting, marginalization, and harassment of DPA signatory groups. Eisa Musa, Head of Security and Police, and Adam Ali War, a Ceasefire Commission representative of SLM-Minni, described the attacks as the government's effort to fragment Minnawi's force. They acknowledged that SLM-Minnawi has lost supporters to rival movements such as the National Redemption Front, as their members feel isolated, targeted, and not rewarded by the DPA. Musa stated that it is "very clear" that the government is pushing its recruitment efforts for the SAF, and placing janjaweed into positions in the Border Patrol, police, and army. Both Musa and War doubted that the perpetrators of the shootings would be brought to justice, as law enforcement and the courts are extensions of the NCP and "the judicial system and police are political institutions." War criticized the "total neglect" of the DPA's security protocols, especially by the government, which uses the janjaweed and militia as tools to "buy control of Darfur."

15. (SBU) On April 2, locally employed staff observed unusual movements of heavily armed SLM-Minnawi roaming throughout El-Fasher, brandishing weapons. Local staff commented that although it is common for SLM-Minnawi to have arms in the city, the group's current amount of firepower, high level of awareness, and overall preparedness were "out of the ordinary." Representatives from other Darfur rebel groups, including former El Fasher-based JEM reps, agreed that these displays and gunfights were unusual.

#### DISPLAY OF FORCE

16. (SBU) In response to anti-census protests in IDP camps in El Fasher and Nyala, the SAF and related security groups paraded through towns in North and South Darfur in full force twice during the week of March 30. Senior UNAMID personnel remarked at daily briefings on April 1 and 2 that such shows of force were intended to "maintain law and order" in the areas. The presence of even more heavily armed SAF members is also noticeable in El Fasher. The UNAMID Force Commander on April 2 said he anticipates similar displays in West Darfur, where anti-census protests are expected next.

#### JANJAWEEED

17. (SBU) In addition to the three clashes between SLM-Minnawi and Arab militias during the week of March 30, there have been other reports of an increased presence of janjaweed in Darfur and their reintegration into the GoS's multi-layered security apparatus. On March 27, Abu Bashir Al-Ahmed, Umdah of Abu Shouk camp, high school teacher, and community activist, told emboff that in the past several months, janjaweed have been strategically positioned outside of many IDP camps. Ahmed reported that the janjaweed often display reckless behavior, drinking alcohol and shooting their weapons at night. "It terrifies us in the camps," stated Ahmed.

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18. (SBU) UNAMID force protection, civilian police, and military observers at multiple camps all over Darfur have also noted the revitalization of janjaweed into Sudanese security structures. On March 23, Kabkabiya Sector Headquarters the Deputy Camp Commander recounted for FieldOff an incident in March wherein an estranged janjaweed fighter turned himself over to UNAMID authorities. This individual had two official IDs as well, one showing him as a Major in the janjaweed militia and one showing him as a Corporal in the SAF.

19. (SBU) Also in a March 23 visit to Nertiti Base Camp Deputy Camp Commander pointed out to FieldOff dozens of men in the near vicinity of the camp that he labeled as janjaweed. Pointing to a man on horseback less than 100 meters from where the UNAMID group was standing outside the camp, the Deputy Commander explained that janjaweed often rode by the camp, hiding their rifles under their clothes to evade the eye of armed UNMAID guards. Despite the janjaweed's obvious presence, as well as that of other armed Arab groups, the Camp Commander MAJ Antoine Kayiranga said UNAMID's night patrols and outreach to janjaweed and Arab leaders in Gorne and Guldo had been effective in reducing the incidents of banditry and in creating better communication with other armed groups.

110. (SBU) In a March 25 meeting the Secretary General of the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority, Ishaq Ahmed Abdul Rahman, told emboffs that janjaweed inside El-Fasher are totally integrated into the local police, the Popular Defense Forces, the border intelligence, and the central reserve police. He claimed that the National Intelligence and Security Service is responsible for the coordination between Arab militias, janjaweed, and the security apparatus. He added this noticeable presence of the janjaweed has created a general concern among the local population about the legitimacy of law enforcement.

#### IMPENDING FIGHT BETWEEN GoS AND JEM?

111. (SBU) In the April 1 UNAMID Morning Brief, the Chief of UNAMID's military intelligence unit reported on March 31

conversations between UNAMID and GoS security operatives. One of these conversations focused on JEM activities in West Darfur. The GoS operatives reportedly told UNAMID about JEM plans for an attack against GoS positions. FieldOff spoke with JEM Field Commander GEN Mohamed Beshier following this briefing, and Beshier adamantly denied any such JEM plans, noting that JEM areas, particularly Jebel Moun, were relatively calm in recent days. [NOTE: Over the past four months Beshier has been forthcoming regarding JEM military plans, often reporting when and where JEM was planning attacks in West Darfur before they took place. While rebel leaders are not always the most trustworthy of sources, Beshier has been reliable with his information to date. END NOTE]. Beshier assessed that the GoS made the statement as a pretext for unilateral GoS military action against JEM in West Darfur. In a subsequent conversation with Joint Mediation Support Team member Muin Shreim, Muin told FieldOff he had had a similar exchange with a GoS interlocutor when discussing a possible visit in mid-April by the Special Envoys to Jebel Moun to meet JEM representatives. The GoS contact advised Muin "not to go anytime soon," lending further credence to the likelihood of impending military action in the region.

¶12. (SBU) FieldOff reported this information to the UNAMID Chief of Staff and Chief of Planning, the latter of whom is planning a trip to the Kulbus/Silea area on April 4 to investigate [NOTE: UNAMID Chief of Staff remarked to emboffs the week of March 16 that GoS troop movements in West Darfur indicate that it is "planning to try to wipe out JEM once and for all." END NOTE]. UNAMID on April 2 reported sightings of GoS attack helicopters over El Geneina, where, according to JEM sources in Abeche, at least 100 injured Chadian rebels retreated after having been beaten back by the Government of Chad (GoC) in fighting over the past 24 hours [NOTE: One JEM source reported that the GoC was "celebrating" in Abeche on April 2. END NOTE]. JEM sources added that 50 Chadian rebel vehicles had been destroyed in the "severe" fighting that took place in Ade Beida, and UNAMID confirmed that NGOs had been evacuated from that area to El Geneina.

COMMENT

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¶13. (SBU) It is possible that the GoS may be racing to "complete the job" in Darfur before UNAMID troops deploy in greater numbers. This certainly appears to be the case with JEM, which the GoS views as its only real adversary. However government forces in Darfur appear to be taking a more muscular approach at the moment toward SLM/Minawi as well. The increased aggression on the part of janjaweed forces in and around El Fasher is troubling, and seems to be an attempt at intimidating and marginalizing the insurgents. The display of force at an IDP camp in El Fasher makes less sense,

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however, especially as its outcome may have led to IDP protests against the census in the first place.

FERNANDEZ